



# STORIES of HOPE

## RWANDA



The PEPFAR-supported Society for Women and AIDS in Africa counseling center in Kigali, Rwanda, is a beacon of hope for people living with HIV/AIDS.

*Joel is one of nearly 7,000 clients who have received face-to-face counseling at the SWAA center.*



### Counseling Center Improves Quality of Life

Joel, a 41-year-old resident of Kigali, Rwanda, became very discouraged and lost all self-confidence after learning he was HIV-positive. As his condition worsened and his body weakened, he did not want to go on living.

In 2003, he followed a roadside sign to a counseling center for people living with HIV/AIDS run by the Society for Women and AIDS in Africa (SWAA), which is now supported by the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (Emergency Plan/PEPFAR). Although initially nervous about entering, Joel relaxed when he received a warm welcome and saw the bustle of activity at the center.

The SWAA counseling and referral center provides information and training, as well as activities to build community support for people living with HIV/AIDS. Family Health International supported SWAA as they expanded their services and started a counseling and referral center in 2002. More than 14,000 clients benefited from clinical services or educational activities, focusing on nutrition, family planning, hygiene, home-based care, positive living and prevention of sexually transmitted infections.

Fortunée Twiyubahe, director of the SWAA counseling and referral center, said counseling has the most impact by helping clients who lose the will to live after finding out that they are HIV-positive. Joel is one of nearly 7,000 clients who have received face-to-face counseling at the SWAA center. Through counseling, Joel has learned to accept his HIV status and live positively. Joel and his wife, who is also HIV-positive, participated in the center's microfinance project, which gives loans for small-scale business enterprises such as selling produce.

Thanks to activities at SWAA counseling and referral center, Joel and his wife have improved their quality of life and are able to support themselves financially.

**The U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief**

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